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TELEGRAM

June 04, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2654 - PRIORITY)
TAGS: PINR, PGOV, PINS, PNAT, PREL, KPRP
Captions: None
Subject: (S/NF) INFORMATION ON IRAQI SUNNI CLERIC AHMED
AL-KUBAYSI (C-NE3-00474)
Ref: None

S E C R E T ABU DHABI 02654

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: ECON RSO AMB DCM P/M

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: POL:STWILLIAMS
CLEARED: A/DCM:TEWILLIAMS

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PP RUEHC RUEKJCS RUCNRAQ RHEHNSC RUEAIIA RHEFDIA
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DE RUEHAD #2654/01 1551052
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 041052Z JUN 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0234
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//OSD/NESA// PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCJACC/USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL//POLAD/CCJ2/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002654

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR INR/NESA, NEA/ARP AND NEA/NGA

E.O. 12958: DECL: (1.6X1)
TAGS: [KPRP](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: (S/NF) INFORMATION ON IRAQI SUNNI
CLERIC AHMED AL-KUBAYSI (C-NE3-00474)

REF: A) STATE 120019; B) ABU DHABI 2013

[¶1.](#) (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba
for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

[¶2.](#) (S/NF) Post provides the following information,
gleaned from conversations with resident Iraqis and
Emirati leaders and academics on Iraqi Sunni cleric

Ahmed Al-Kubaysi. It is by no means comprehensive and we attach the appropriate caveats given the fact that Al-Kubaysi has become somewhat of a divisive figure. We note the different spellings of the subject's name that have appeared in e-mail traffic. Those with direct knowledge of the subject assure us that Al-Kubaysi is the correct English spelling of the name and is derived from name of the subjects ancestral hometown: Al-Kubaysah -- on the banks of the Euphrates river northwest of Baghdad. Subject's last name should not/not be confused with the Al-Qubaisi tribe of the Gulf region. Our answers are keyed to ref A questions:

1A. (S) What are Al-Kubaysi's strengths and limitations? Has he demonstrated an ability to learn, adapt.

Sixty-eight year-old Ahmed Al-Kubaysi is a popular Sunni cleric who returned to Baghdad following the ouster of Saddam in April after five years in exile in the UAE. Al-Kubaysi is an important Sunni religious figure who apparently also appeals to some Shi'a elements, according to expat Iraqis in the UAE as well as senior UAEG officials. Given the extent of his apparent influence, Al-Kubaysi's message is critical. Emirati leaders promoted Al-Kubaysi early on, hopeful that he would help curb Iranian influence and, conversely, serve as a unifying force for Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a. Following his strident April 18 sermon at the Abu Hanifa Mosque in Baghdad, and our expressions of concern, the Emiratis worked with Al-Kubaysi to encourage a more measured tone. Following this Emirati engagement, we have noted a slight moderation. For example, in a May 8 interview with the English language Dubai-based "Gulf News" Al-Kubaysi warned against forming an Islamic government in Iraq "at this time." When asked about his call for a "jihad," Al-Kubaysi said "It would not be to the advantage of the Iraqis to fight the Americans at this time."

1B. (S) Who is included in Al-Kubaysi's decision making? What role do advisors and staff play? How open is the leader to outside ideas?

It is unclear to us the extent of Al-Kubaysi's organization. According to the local press and expatriate Iraqis, Al-Kubaysi, following his return to Baghdad, established the Iraqi Muslim Scholars Association (comprising Sunni and Shi'a clerics) and a political party -- the Iraqi Unified National Movement (NFI). Expat Iraqis in the UAE tell us that the clerics' "association" or committee is modeled after Rafsanjani's Expediency Council in Iran (NFI). Al-Kubaysi is closely aligned with the UAE leadership in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The UAE leadership have repeatedly told us that they can influence his message and activities. The Emiratis, given their stake in his success, are working closely with Al-Kubaysi to sensitize him to U.S. policy objectives in Iraq.

1C. (S) What are the equities of those involved?

For the Emiratis, Iran poses an existential threat and anything that strengthens Iranian regional ambitions is of concern to the UAE. The Emiratis are worried about the potential for an Iranian-influenced Shi'a theocracy in Iraq which in their view would encourage similar Shi'a movements elsewhere on the Arabian peninsula, resulting in further regional instability. Thus, they view Al-Kubaysi as a possible counterweight to potential Iranian influence in Iraq. Given the fact that the Sunni comprise between only 20-30% of Iraq's

population, the Emiratis want to ensure that whatever Sunni religious leader emerges is moderate, open to outside ideas and, perhaps most importantly, has appeal among Sunnis and Shi'a.

¶D. (S) What is the quality of information the leader relies upon to reach conclusions? Does it vary from issue to issue? To what degree is information reaching the leader politicized?

Unclear. The UAE has tried to sensitize Al-Kubaysi to U.S. foreign policy concerns and has urged moderation.

¶E. Through J. (U) Post does not yet have the answers to these questions. As we develop further information, we will forward it.

¶K. (S) What is the leader's tribal affiliation, if any? Are they religious?

According to a reliable local Iraqi expat source, Al-Kubaysi does not have a prominent tribal affiliation. Rather, his name comes from his family's hometown -- Al-Kubaysah -- on the banks of the Euphrates river. Al-Kubaysi himself was born in Fallujah, another Sunni stronghold. He is religious. He is a Sunni from the Hanafi school and while in Dubai, was in charge of a weekly religious affairs program on Dubai TV. He also helped draft the UAE's personal status law and served as an advisor to the court of Dubai Crown Prince Muhammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum.

¶L. (S) Where was leader educated?

We have been told that he was educated at Al-Azhar and also studied in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (NFI).

¶M. (S) What languages does the leader speak?

Arabic. His English is reportedly quite poor.

¶N. (S) Describe the leader's professional background and family background?

Before fleeing Iraq in 1998, Al-Kubaysi reportedly was one of Iraq's most prominent Sunni imams; he was also a professor of Islamic Studies at Baghdad University. As we noted above, when he moved to the UAE, he was employed by Dubai TV and served as an advisor to the Dubai government. The Al-Kubaysi family is apparently quite wealthy and is rumored to have made its money -- in the old days -- from smuggling.

¶O. (S) Does the leader have ties to other countries?

Al-Kubaysi has strong ties to the UAE, as noted above. We have also heard that he has some ties to the Saudi ruling family (NFI).

WAHBA